

# Women as City's Housekeepers a Success

## Day's Tour With a Tenement House Inspector Reveals Knotty Problems to Be Solved by Tact

**I**F you are a landlord or tenant in New York city there are certain rules you must obey, or, like Orphan Annie, "The goblins'll get you if you don't watch out."

These goblins are the nine women inspectors of the Tenement House Department and the five women inspectors of the Street Cleaning Department. They have earned the unofficial title of municipal housekeepers.

Since the Tenement House Department was established in 1902 women have been employed by it to teach the duty of good housekeeping. The task is not easy. Rain or shine the inspector must be at work. She encounters many difficulties. The women inspectors in the Street Cleaning Department have been at work for a year and the chief inspector, Miss Elizabeth A. Branagan, has been connected with the department for ten years, being employed for nine years in a clerical capacity.

On a rather soggy morning I made a tour of duty with Miss Jessie H. McVean, one of the inspectors of the Tenement House Department. Her work was in the Cherry street district.

The first house we entered was one that seemed to exhibit every possible violation of the tenement house laws. That there could be a worse example one could not believe, but Miss McVean cheerfully assured me that this was not really one of the worst.

### Garbage Cans Open in Hall.

To begin with, the halls were dark and the odor was anything but pleasing. Miss McVean was not long in discovering the reason of the latter trouble, for back in the hall, under the stairs, stood cans of garbage full to overflowing and uncovered.

"This is a condition," said Miss McVean, "that must be remedied by both janitor and tenants. You see, they have no dumbwaiter in this house. Each tenant brings the refuse from her kitchen down here and empties it into the cans, which are supposed to be covered, but as you see, are not. The indolence of the janitor creates a worse condition, for the cans are not put out regularly and they overflow. You see the result. This must be cleaned up."

Miss McVean knocked on the door of a rear flat. The door was opened by a slovenly woman who nodded when asked if she was the janitress.

"I am the tenement house inspector," said Miss McVean. "Come into the hall."

The woman came out, slopping along in her carpet slippers and grumbling.

"Why don't you clean up your halls and the garbage and ash cans?" asked the inspector.

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"But you must clean them up," insisted Miss McVean.

"I no care," was the stolid reply.

"But the law does care," and the one little word of three letters produced a sudden change.

"I no do nothing wrong," spluttered the slovenly one. "You no arrest me. I no can help."

### Has Covers Found for Cans.

"You must help. Every morning these cans must be placed out in the street; they must be kept covered in the halls and you must clean around them. You must tell the women not to throw garbage on the floor. Now, where are the covers?"

The woman pointed to the courtyard. There, with other litter, lay the covers of the cans. She was sent to get them.

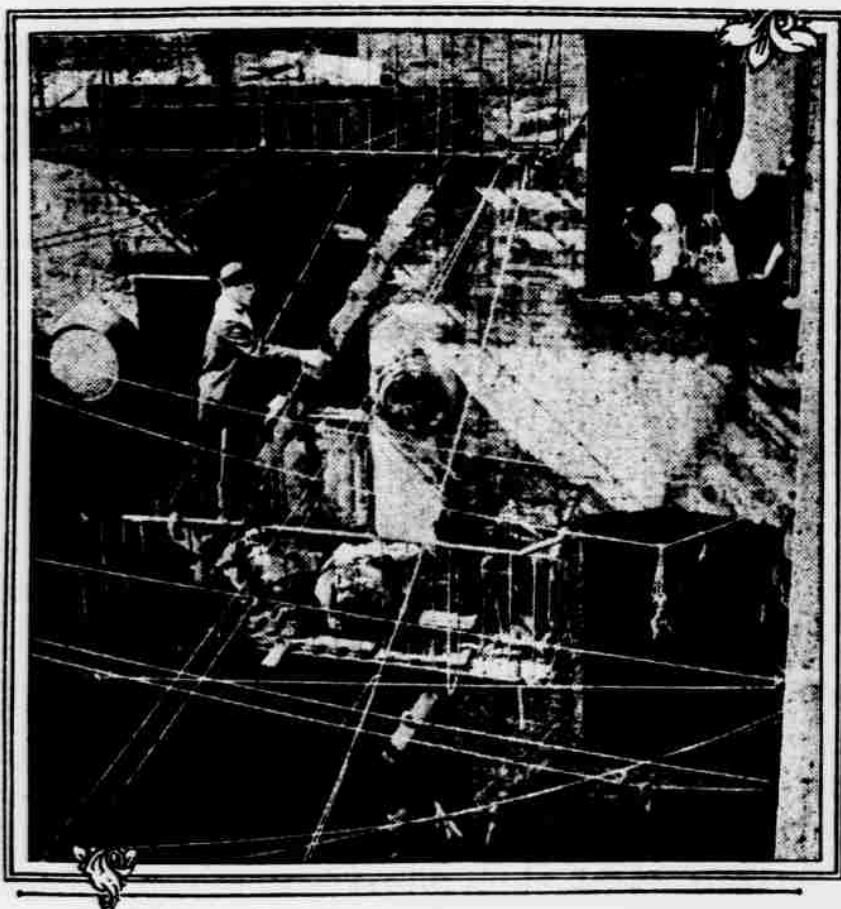
By this time a little group of women with their children had collected in the hall. Miss McVean turned to them.

"Do you want to be sick, have the baby sick, perhaps die?" she asked.

There was a great head shaking among the women.

"If you keep your halls like this you will be sick; your babies may die. You understand? Put the garbage carefully in the cans, put on the cover, make the janitor keep the halls clean, try to help her. Do you understand?"

Several of them said they did, but a



Seeing that fire escapes are kept clear is only one of the inspector's troubles.

couple looked as though they did not. Miss McVean quickly singled them out.

"Those women don't understand English. Tell them in Italian what I have said. You tell them," she pointed to one intelligent looking young woman, who translated for the others' benefit. "Now I am going through the house, and when I come back I want to see this clean. Get the cans out; wash up the floor."

Out in the littered court we went. She called to the janitor: "This court must be cleaned, too, before I come back next week."

Looking up toward the top of the houses, Miss McVean pointed to the fire escapes.

"How many people could use those fire escapes in case of necessity, do you think?" she asked.

The fire escapes were blocked with wash tubs, wood, bags, boards—everything, in fact, not wanted inside. Planking had been laid over the openings in many instances. It was obvious that there would be trouble if the fire escapes had to be used in a sudden emergency.

"Fire escapes," explained Miss McVean, "constitute one of our greatest troubles not only in the tenement districts but in sections of the city where you would never expect that intelligent people would block them up by using them as store places."

### Inspector's Visit Noted.

We went into the house again. The janitress was working with the cans, grumbling all the time. Up stairs Miss McVean knocked at a door. The word had gone through the house that the inspector was there. The door did not open.

"What you want?" came from the other side.

"Inspector," called Miss McVean, and in a minute the door was opened.

The rooms were clean enough, but Miss McVean went to the window and found the fire escape piled high with various articles so that passage was entirely cut off. Above it was the same way.

"Come here," she said to the woman. "Clean all this stuff off. You cannot get out if the house burns. You will be burned to death. You like that?"

"No, no, no!" said the woman. "No place in the house for things."

"You must clean it off just the same. Now, begin."

With that the woman began her work and Miss McVean continued through the house. Looking out of the windows of each flat we could see women working clearing away the debris. Many had seen what was going on and had not waited for orders. Within an hour the fire escapes had been cleared, save those where the tenants were not at home. For these Miss McVean left instructions with other tenants and told them she expected to find the escapes all clear on her next round.

Down stairs we found the hall cleaned up, and the cans on the sidewalk. But we knew well that when the street cleaning inspector came along the janitress would see more trouble.

This experience illustrated only a part

of the work the inspectors must do. Leaking roofs come in their work; they inspect fire escapes that have been furnished where there were none; roof tanks are inspected, dumbwaiter shafts are examined. In short, their duties cover every detail that affects the health or safety of tenants.

A booklet covering the subject has been prepared by the tenement house committee of the Charity Organization Society, which has been cooperating with the Tenement House Department. The booklet is designed to instruct people in tenement house rules and sanitation methods. Copies are distributed by the inspectors and demonstrations are made in many cases in the flats. This is educational work and much has been accomplished by means of it.

### Explains Need for Fresh Air.

In one flat we visited in the afternoon Miss McVean showed a woman how to wash the painted walls, explained to her that lack of fresh air in a bedroom meant illness and made her clean up about the sink. Then she took me into flats in another section where the inspectors had been at work.

Spotless, that is what they were; clean and sweet, and the women who lived in them were glad to see the inspector. After having looked on the ugly picture of the first district visited this was a real demonstration of what can be done. Miss McVean explained that these clean flats had been as bad if not worse than the others.

The other women inspectors in the Tenement House Department are Mary Sullivan, Mary M. McVean, Elizabeth J. Shea, Helen D. Thompson, Gertrude U. Light, Theresa S. McGinn, Mary Conway Woods and C. L. Kunz. Miss McGinn and Miss Woods are working in Brooklyn.

This is what is being done to keep the flats clean inside, but equally important outside work falls to the Street Cleaning Department. The five women inspectors work in three boroughs. Aside from their regular street inspections they lecture in public schools, before clubs and at mothers' meetings. In this way they reach not only the householders, but also the tenants.

These women have helped to clean up some of the worst districts in New York.

"I certainly believe," said Miss Branagan, "that our work is woman's work. A woman understands household conditions better than does a man. She can reach the women easier and can enlist their aid. If you gain over one woman in ten you are going to have things better, for she takes a pride in inducing others to clean up also."

"Now we are going into a street which I hope soon to have a model of cleanliness instead of being in the condition it is now." We were walking through a tenement section near St. Mark's place.

"Isn't that a pleasant sight?" said Miss Branagan as she pointed to three cans of garbage and two of ashes filled to overflowing, with some of the refuse on the sidewalk.

Miss Branagan called out the janitor

## Proper Care of Garbage and Keeping Fire Escapes Clear Two Important Tasks Faced Daily

of the house. He was a big, burly fellow and looked sullenly at the inspector.

"I thought I told you last week that you couldn't leave the cans in this way," said Miss Branagan.

"Well, you did. What of it?" was the response.

"There is just this much of it," and the inspector looked very much as if she meant business, "that you are going to clean up this mess immediately and find a can to hold the overflow."

"Who says I am?"

"I say so. Either clean it up or you'll go to court."

"Well, what can I do," he hedged, "if your fine Street Cleaning Department doesn't come and get the stuff?"

"That only happens, you know, when the weather makes it impossible for them to come. Then you must have enough cans to last seventy-two hours. Are these all you have?"

"They are."

"They are not enough. One can to four tenants is the rule. You know that. Where are the others?"

"In the cellar."

"Why aren't they here?"

"Well, I didn't want to bother to bring them up."

### Laziness Primary Cause.

Now, there is the proposition many a street inspector meets—laziness and disregard for law and order. However, the man set to work, and as he did so Miss Branagan started the janitress in the next house picking up litter and paper from the sidewalk and putting the stuff in a bag.

"All the way through these districts this is the work that has to be done," she said. "It means talking continually until you have drilled it into them that they must keep the streets clean. It takes months sometimes to clean a district, and then you must return to it again and again."

"Talking sanitation and the prevention of disease through keeping things clean does more good than you would think, and it is through preaching the gospel of cleanliness that much is accomplished. No, I cannot say that an inspector's life is rose colored, but when a district is cleaned up one feels well satisfied and as if it is really worth while."

When you pass through a street and find a well dressed young woman talking earnestly with a janitor, or that janitor cleaning up the walk and the young woman looking on, you may be sure that this is one of the women inspectors at work. They do not wear uniforms; that is not necessary, but their badge of office carries conviction to the minds of the people and their success has been marked.

Can women look after the municipal housekeeping of a city like New York? Go out with one of them some day and find out for yourself.

## Old Maid Insurance

**A** PLAN for old maid insurance proposed by Dr. Karl Littenberger is being seriously considered in Germany as a guarantee against economic distress and a measure to increase the matrimonial prospects of spinsters.

The girls may take out the insurance themselves, or it may be taken out for them. Premiums are paid until the twentieth year of the insured. If the woman is not married by the time she reaches the age of 37 she will be entitled to draw an annuity thenceforward. Even if she finds a husband after she passes the 37 year mark she will continue to draw the annuity.

If the insured marries before 37 she cannot claim an annuity, but may recover with interest the total amount of premiums paid. Should the insured die before the age of 37 the cash value of her policy will go to her heirs.

According to the census of 1910, there were 800,000 more females than males in the German Empire. The war has greatly increased the disparity.